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A Learned Profession— A Compassionate Profession

It began with those horrifying pictures we all saw on television and in the news media. An entire American city literally under water. The immediate concerns were obvious—food, shelter, and medical treatment for tens of thousands of people. As the true impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita began to be felt, I was struck by an e-mail I received from Professor Michelle Ghetti of the Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana about the hurricane's effect on the legal system in Louisiana:

Five thousand to 6,000 lawyers (one-third of the lawyers in Louisiana) have lost their offices, their libraries, their computers with all information thereon, their client files . . .

Our state supreme court is under some water—with all appellate files and evidence folders/boxes along with it. The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals building is under some water—with the same effect. Right now there may only be three to four feet of standing water but, if you think about it, most files are kept in the basements or lower floors of courthouses. What effect will that have on the lives of citizens and lawyers throughout this state and this area of the country? And on the law?

The city and district courts in as many as eight parishes/counties are under water, as well as three of our circuit courts—with evidence/files at each of them ruined. The law enforcement offices in those areas are under water—again, with evidence ruined. Six thousand prisoners in two prisons and our juvenile facility are having to be securely relocated. We already have over-crowding at most Louisiana prisons and juvenile facilities. What effect will this have? And what happens when the evidence in their cases has been destroyed? Will the guilty be released upon the communities? Will the innocent not be able to prove their innocence?

Our state bar offices are under water. Our state disciplinary offices are under water—

again with evidence ruined. Our state disciplinary offices are located on Veteran's Blvd. in Metairie. Those of you who have been watching the news, they continue to show Veteran's Blvd. It's the shot with the destroyed Target store and shopping center under water and that looks like a long canal. Our Committee on Bar Admissions is located there and would have been housing the bar exams, which have been turned in from the recent July bar exam (this is one time I'll pray the examiners were late in turning them in—we were set to meet in two weeks to go over the results). Will all of those new graduates have to retake the bar exam?

Two of the four law schools in Louisiana are located in New Orleans (Loyola and Tulane—the two private ones that students have already paid about \$8,000+ for this semester to attend). Another 1,000+ lawyers-to-be whose lives have been detoured . . .

And then there are the clients whose files are lost, whose cases are stymied. Their lives, too, are derailed. Of course, the vast majority live in the area and that's the least of their worries. But the New Orleans firms also have a large national and international client base. For example, I received an e-mail from one attorney friend who I work with on some crucial domestic violence (spousal and child) cases around the nation—those clients could be seriously impacted by the loss, even temporarily, of their attorney and he can't get to them and is having difficulty contacting the many courts around the nation where his cases are pending. Large corporate clients may have their files blowing

in the wind where the high rise buildings had windows blown out.

I woke up this morning to the picture of Veteran's Blvd., which made me think of my students who just took the bar. My thoughts wandered from there to the effect on the Disciplinary Offices. Then my thoughts continued on. I'm sure I'm still missing a big part of the future picture. It's just devastating. Can you imagine something of this dimension in your state?

To answer Professor Ghetti's question, I really cannot imagine something of this dimension happening in Michigan. It seems unfathomable. What has not surprised me, however, is the immediate offers of help provided by Michigan lawyers from all across the state. From the moment the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina and later Hurricane Rita became clear, lawyers across the state of Michigan began to ask: What can we do to help? How can we be of special service? The State Bar of Michigan and staff were literally deluged with calls and e-mails. The State Bar immediately set up a resource page, established a special Hurricane Katrina Relief Campaign with the Access to Justice Fund, and also began to coordinate lawyer pro bono activity. Set forth below are just a few of the many, many activities undertaken by Michigan lawyers in support of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts:

A contingent of the **Ionia County Prosecutor's Office** went to Shreveport, Louisiana immediately after the hurricane struck. They

HOW TO HELP:

- To contribute to the State Bar's Access to Justice Katrina Appeal, visit www.michbar.org/programs/ATJCampaign/home.cfm.
- If you want to volunteer, a list of aid resources is available at www.michbar.org/news/releases/archives05/katrinaresources.cfm.

accepted donations of food, clothing, blankets, and money and gave these items to the Red Cross when they arrived in Shreveport. They spent two days volunteering their time.

The State Bar of Michigan **Young Lawyers Section** and the Grand Rapids, Ingham, Macomb, and Oakland County chapters hosted three events on two evenings to raise funds for the American Red Cross.

Third Circuit Judge **Cynthia D. Stephens** helped set up a shelter in Houston. Her work included getting children enrolled in school, establishing temporary shelter, and arranging for federal housing subsidies for a newly located building to be renovated for evacuees.

Foster Swift Collins & Smith attorney **Kirsten McNelly** provided pro bono family law help to a Katrina evacuee in need of a modification to a parenting time order. Living in Gulfport, and originally from Lansing, the person was rescued by her Lansing family but was experiencing family difficulty in the new living arrangement.

Denise Nelson, Executive Director of the **Kalamazoo County Bar Association**, reports that the bar association purchased 230 phone cards for use by evacuees that arrived at Fort Custer in Battle Creek.

Lorraine Weber advises that the **Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association** organized a Relief Fund and **General Motors** made an initial \$5,000 donation to the Louisiana Bar fund for reconstruction of the legal infrastructure and to help attorneys. DMBA is working with the **Legal Aid and Defender Association** to provide volunteer attorneys for needed help.

Executive Director **Judy Van Amburg** reports that the **Washtenaw County Bar Association** has established a Legal Task Force to address issues that may arise with the arrival of evacuees from New Orleans to Ann Arbor. Chair **Mike Fried** and **Ann Routt**, who is the Deputy Director of the **Legal Services of South Central Michigan**, are on the task force.

Women Lawyers Association of Michigan authorized President **Ann Routt** to e-mail the membership asking for pro bono assistance for the legal services providers in the state.

Kristen Kemp, Executive Director, reports that the **Ingham County Bar Associa-**

tion is working with **Thomas M. Cooley Law School** to have members available on a pro bono basis should the need arise. They will screen calls and refer those in need to the State Bar, **Legal Services of South Central Michigan**, and others. They also participated in the Young Lawyers Section fundraiser in Lansing on October 6 for Katrina victims.

Grand Rapids Bar Association President-Elect **Paul Sorensen** reports that **President Judge Sullivan** convened a special committee of Grand Rapids Bar members to plan for legal assistance to Katrina evacuees in the Grand Rapids area. Working through the Red Cross, **West Michigan Legal Services** will provide the first point of contact for legal assistance. A special expanded panel of Grand Rapids lawyers has been created to provide pro bono help.

The **Genesee County Bar's** Executive Director **Ramona Sain** has been in contact with the Genesee County Emergency Management & Homeland Security Director and determined that there is no legal component in their current plan, outside of the role of the Genesee County Corporation Counsel. The Genesee Bar will be looking for a long-term emergency legal plan, hopefully in collaboration with **Legal Services of Eastern Michigan**, and possibly Genesee County Emergency Management.

The **Grand Traverse Leelanau Antrim Bar** has made a donation to the Salvation Army. Other ideas for assisting in the relief effort are under discussion, according to **Mike Borden**.

The **National Lawyers Guild** president **Julianne Cuneo** reports that the Guild will do a street law clinic to help about 50 evacuees currently in Macomb County.

Miller Canfield contributed \$10,000 to the American Red Cross. Attorneys and staff in the Lansing office donated \$1,000 to the Salvation Army and Kalamazoo office residents donated \$1,100 to the Red Cross. Other satellite offices donated to the relief efforts as well.

Larry Jordan advises that through the contributions of employees and the match from the firm, **Jaffe Raitt Heuer & Weiss** sent in \$10,576 to the Red Cross.

Henry Cooney advises that **Plunkett & Cooney** will make a contribution to the

American Red Cross of \$25,000, plus a matching contribution for contributions from staff in the range of \$5,000. Total contribution by the firm should be in the range of \$35,000. Attorneys in the firm have also made their own private donations.

Brooks & Kushman reports that **Lord and Taylor is matching up to a million dollars!** For years, the firm's casual Fridays have resulted in \$40,000–\$50,000 in charitable contributions. Casual Friday collected \$3,000 for Hurricane Katrina, and three attorneys matched that: \$12,000 was taken to Lord and Taylor for the Red Cross matching funds.

Attorney **Melissa Markey** reports that she is also an emergency medical technician and has worked with Red Cross disaster planning. She recommends that the State Bar, in cooperation with appropriate governmental agencies, look at Michigan's emergency legal plan before an emergency arises here.

Animal Law Section members responded to a call from the Capitol Area and Grand Rapids Humane Society for help in adopting some of the hundreds of pets flown in from hurricane areas. Many members adopted pets. Member **Allie Phillips** traveled to Mississippi to assist at the fairgrounds, which served as a shelter for hundreds of displaced pets.

The State Bar of Michigan is keenly aware of the devastation wreaked by the hurricanes upon the lives and practices of the lawyers of the Gulf region and the impact on the public they serve. Throughout the country, even in the best of times, there is a great, unmet need for legal services for low-income families, and Michigan lawyers have historically been in the forefront of support for legal aid and Access to Justice programs. I urge you to continue your support for the hurricane victims through the Hurricane Katrina Appeal established in connection with the State Bar of Michigan's Access to Justice campaign. Remember too that low-income families in Michigan are also in need of your financial aid and assistance. Hopefully your contribution to the Access to Justice campaign will be ongoing long after the devastation of the hurricanes has been healed. Let us join together in this hour of need to reach out to our fellow citizens in the Gulf region and here at home as well. ◆